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EVALUATION OF THE MASTER'S DEGREE IN EDUCATION RELATED
TO CONTEMPORARY DENTAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

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EVALUATION OF THE MASTER'S DEGREE IN EDUCATION RELATED TO CONTEMPORARY

DENTAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

→ A survey of dental school deans concerning their perception of the importance of the MEd degree in dental education was undertaken. It was shown that 64 schools had a total of 208 individuals with the degree. The degree was perceived to enhance the possibility of academic position attainment and advancement especially in administration and as departmental chairpersons. Although data was not overwhelming, the respondents attached varying amounts of importance to the degree especially in conjunction with other positive academic credentials. The pedagogical aspects of dental education have been lacking and the acquisition of this degree is an encouraging possibility in helping to improve this identified deficiency.

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INTRODUCTION:

The health professions are facing ever more complex problems in the delivery of doctoral and postdoctoral educational programs. The rising demand for various health services, the increase in continuing education programs, and the increasingly important concept of accreditation and re-accreditation of educational programs requires professional educators able to perform competently in various levels and aspects of health care education and administration. These factors are especially apparent at the present time in the field of dental education.

In recent years a trend has developed whereby many dental educators have sought a master's degree in education in the hope that it would improve their teaching effectiveness and administrative ability for dental school and other dental educational positions. One dental school recently had fourteen staff dental educators attain their master's degrees in education. The school's purpose was to provide the faculty with advanced training in education principles presumably so that they could become better teachers, administrators and researchers.¹

No attempt has yet been made to evaluate the impact of the master's degree in education on the dental profession. The purpose of this study was to obtain and analyze data obtained from dental schools in order to determine to what extent the degree is considered of value in the dental education community.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

The authors are unaware of any publication dealing specifically with the MEd degree as it relates to the field of dental education.

Saroff² surveyed the perceived educational needs of a dental school faculty and found that most dental educators have little or no formal training

in education at the undergraduate or the graduate level. He also found that 95% of his respondents indicated a belief that increased knowledge in education is desirable. He suggested that a solution might be to modify recruitment efforts and requirements for dental faculty to include formal pedagogical background.

Killip³ and others discussed criteria for the selection of new dental teachers. They stated that dental and medical educators don't know how to teach and suggested that a minimum level of knowledge in pedagogy is required even for the beginning teacher. They advocated an organized pattern of teacher education programs or inservice programs under the direction of an educational advisor.

Bradley⁴ expressed concern about the fact that too few programs are specifically designed to train dental teachers. He advocated in-depth training in educational methodology. Conversely, Till⁵ discussed the methods of locating and evaluating potential dental school faculty members in the "labor market". He discussed the attributes a candidate must possess and concluded that formal training in teaching was not of major importance.

Keevil⁶ reported on dental hygiene educational programs and their administrators in an attempt to assess basic faculty manpower needs. She concluded that dental hygienists or dentists interested in teaching should pursue graduate degrees in higher education or allied health fields.

Jacobs and Zulla⁷ surveyed the American dental schools and detected a definite need for personnel whose primary responsibility was research in education and training of health professions people. Their findings suggested that a master's of education in conjunction with a dental degree would be highly desirable and roughly on par with a doctorate in education alone as far as probability of employment for this purpose was concerned.

Pullon and Jones⁸ surveyed the deans of American dental schools concerning

their feelings about formal administrative training for dental school deans. They found that most deans were of the opinion that advanced administrative training in the field of education leading to a master's or doctor's degree would be of benefit but that administrative and teaching experience in itself would be even more helpful. DiBiaggio⁹ and Allman¹⁰ also concluded that specialized education is important in the increasingly complex role of dental school dean.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

A survey instrument consisting of a series of questions involving the various aspects of the MEd degree in dental education was developed. It was sent with an explanatory cover letter to the deans of all dental schools in the United States and Canada as identified from the American Dental Association American Dental Directory.

The raw data from the completed questionnaires was coded and transposed to IBM key-punched cards which were then processed on an IBM model 370 computer.

RESULTS:

Responses were obtained from 64 of the 70 dental schools. Considered of primary importance in this study was the perceived desirability of the MEd degree for dental educators.

Incidence:

Forty-one respondents indicated that they had on their dental faculty a total of 121 individuals with a DDS or DMD degree and a MEd degree. The mean number was 1.891 and the range was 0-15. Forty respondents reported a total of 87 non-dental degree faculty members with a MEd. The mean was 1.359 and the range 0-7 (Table 1). In addition, 24 schools reported a total of 60 faculty members currently working towards their advanced degree in education. These

degrees were MAEd, MEd, EdD, or PhD degrees in education.

Importance of the MEd Degree:

Of the 64 dental school deans exactly 50% thought it was important for a dental educator to have a master's degree in education. Twenty-six percent did not think it was important and 23.4% either did not respond to this question or had no opinion. Many made qualifying comments related to their individual lack of adequate observation and were therefore reluctant to pass judgement. Others commented that the knowledge derived from the courses was much more important than the degree itself. Several respondents qualified their negative answer by declaring that the degree was advantageous but not necessarily vital. Some, conversely, indicated that possession of the MEd degree opened doors for employment and advancement.

Opinions differed rather dramatically related to the enhancement of an individual's job recruitability as a result of having the master's degree in education in the different categories of dental school education (Table 2). As might be expected, the degree was considered to be of importance for an administrator (68.8%) and least important for an Oral Pathologist (40.2%).

The master's degree in education was overwhelmingly considered to be less desirable than a certificate, board certification or a M.S. degree in a clinical specialty of dentistry (Table 3). However, it was considered to be of value by most respondents as an addition to these academic credentials. Many comments indicated the perception that the MEd with dental degree but without specialty training was of very limited value.

Seventy percent of dental school deans indicated that they would encourage current faculty members to seek a master's degree in education and a total of 120 individuals had been so encouraged. Almost 94% of the deans would advise members of their faculty to undertake nondegree course work in education and some schools have developed workshops of their own or have contracted pro-

grams for their faculty.

Interestingly, only 48.4% of respondents indicated that they felt that individuals with the master's degree in education had more teaching competence than those without it. However, none said less, preferring to either non-respond to this particular question, indicate no opinion, or make specific unsolicited but generally favorable comments.

DISCUSSION:

There is a paucity of information in the literature specifically concerning itself with the MEd degree in dental schools and in postgraduate education. Several studies have however, addressed the pedagogical aspects of dental education. While opinion varies to some extent, it is obvious that most authorities feel that training in education is important for those individuals engaged in teaching dentistry. Killip³ and others for example, state bluntly that dental and medical educators don't know how to teach.

Some authors somewhat underestimate the importance of a degree in education and emphasize individual education courses as a part of a clinical residency or as an ongoing project for dental school faculty members. Others suggest on-the-job training, especially in the administrative areas, as a more viable method of improving teaching standards.

The results of the present study reflect this variance of opinion and support the over-riding tenant that dental educators in general need to improve their teaching skills. It is also apparent that there is indeed an increase in the number of people possessing the MEd degree and that many more individuals are currently pursuing this goal.

It was a little surprising that only 50% of dental school deans thought it was important for dental educators to have the MEd degree but this apparent indifference was tempered by the fact that approximately 1/4 of the respondents did not express an opinion in this category.

This study showed that the MEd degree was perceived to be much less important than a clinical specialty certificate, board certification or an MS degree in a clinical specialty. However, it was considered important as an addition to these varied academic credentials.

Most deans indicated they would encourage the pursuit of a MEd and a significant number had done so. Almost all deans would advise their faculty members to pursue nondegree course work in education. Only about 1/2 of respondents stated that the possession of the MEd degree improved teaching competence but this seemingly negative statistic is tempered by the fact that none said it decreased teaching competence. These opinions were closely allied with those concerning the importance of a dental educator having the MEd degree. Many felt that teaching success isn't clearly a function of training in formal pedagogy but more a matter of interest in doing a good teaching job. These respondents conceded, however, that the two usually go hand in hand.

It is apparent that the concept and reality of MEd degrees in dental education is only now beginning to have impact. It is probably too early to secure a definitive and final evaluation regarding whether the movement is a possible panacea. Many deans were tentative and cautious in their questionnaire responses. What came through loud and clear was agreement that dental school teaching needs improvement and that the MEd is one tool which can be directed towards achieving this goal.

SUMMARY:

A survey of dental school deans concerning their perception of the importance of the MEd degree in dental education was undertaken. It was shown that 64 schools had a total of 208 individuals with the degree. The degree was perceived to enhance the possibility of academic position attainment and advancement especially in administration and as departmental chairpersons.

Although data was not overwhelming, the respondents attached varying importance to the degree especially in conjunction with other positive academic credentials. The pedagogical aspects of dental education have been lacking and the acquisition of this degree is an encouraging possibility in helping to improve this identified deficiency.

TABLE 1

Summary of distribution of MEd degrees for faculty with dental degree
and with nondental degree.

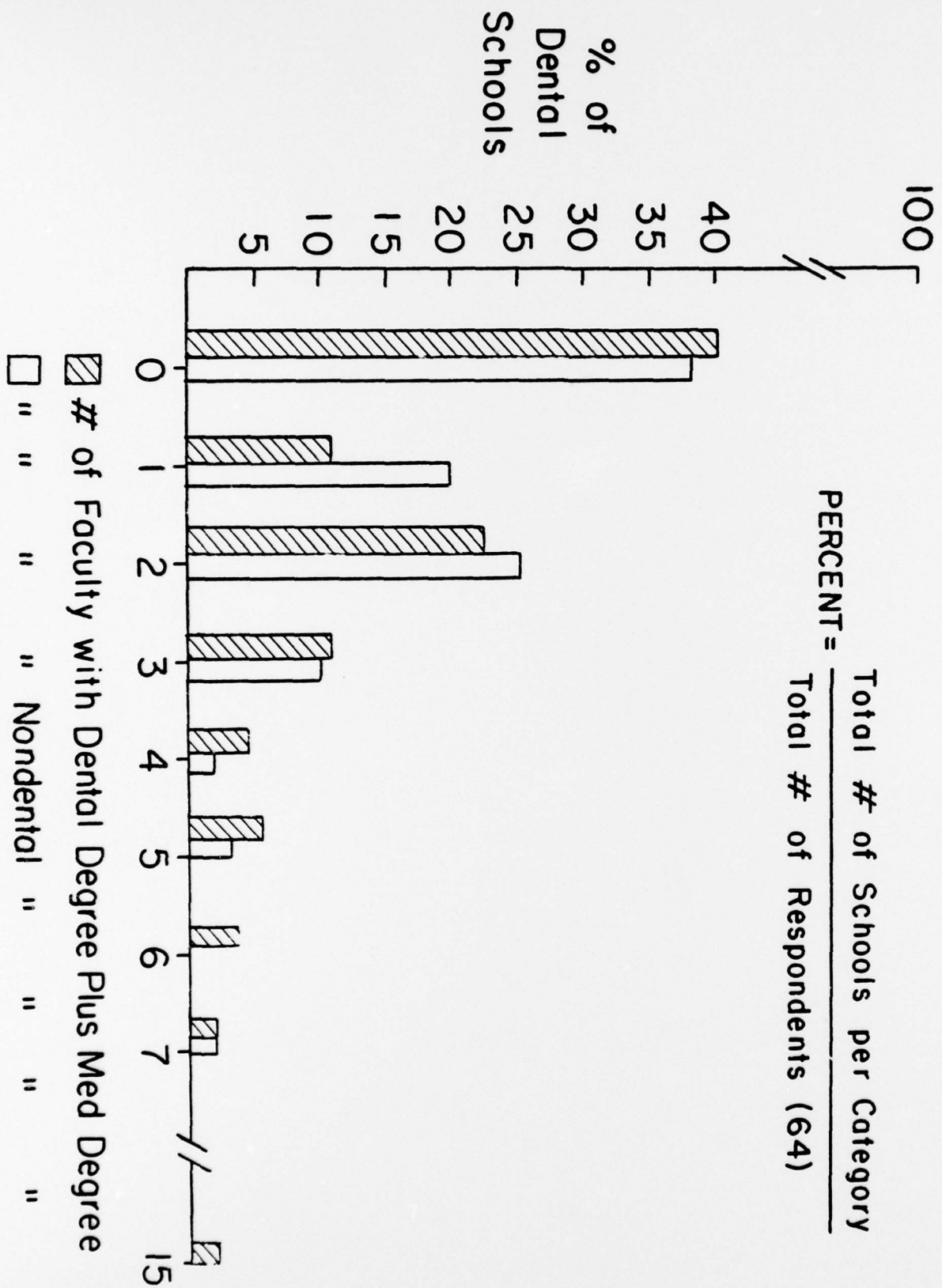


TABLE 2

Summary of Perceived Importance of the MEd Degree in Job Attainment

Category	Important	Not Important	No Opinion	No Response
Administrator	68.8%	21.9%	9.4%	
Department head	64.1	28.1	7.8	
Clinical instructor	54.7	40.6	4.7	
Basic scientist with dental degree	50.0	34.4	14.1	1.6
Basic scientist without dental degree	48.4	37.5	12.5	1.6
Oral diagnostition	42.2	43.8	12.5	1.6
Oral pathologist	40.6	43.8	14.1	

TABLE 3

A Comparison of the Perceived Desirabilities of Academic Credentials

Category	Yes	No	No Response
MEd desirable over board certification	7.8%	75.0%	17.2%
MEd desirable over certificate in a specialty	10.9	71.9	17.2
MEd desirable over an MS in a specialty	10.9	70.3	18.8

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